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- (2) To nominate officers: Professors S. Garner, C. H. Grandgent, A. N. van Daell, E. H. Magill, T. W. Hunt, W. M. Baskervill, Adolphe Cohn, C. W. Kent, C. C. Freeman.
- (3) To recommend place for the next Annual Meeting: Professors A. M. Elliott, Charles Harris, H. E. Greene, E. C. Fay, J. L. Hall.

The reading of papers was then begun.

1. "The Life and Works of Giacomo Leopardi." By Dr. Alex. W. Herdler, of Princeton University.

Giacomo was born the 29th of June, 1798. His father brought him up according to his own theory, without teachers, and seeing his unusual faculties, left him early alone in his large library (at Recanati), which was soon all of life to the boy. Without outside help he learned Greek, Hebrew and the principal modern languages, but his greatest care he bestowed upon the classics. In 1818 he published two Greek poems in the spirit of Anacreon which he gave out for original ones, and so nearly did he approach the language and spirit of his model that everybody was deceived. His letters, dating from 1818-1822, breathe forth the deepest melancholy which was still further aggravated by the opposition of his father to all his plans. To leave Recanati and separate himself from his family seemed to him the only way of salvation. His fiery spirit revolted against an exercise of parental care and authority that seemed to him so unreasonable. Finally in 1822 he left for Rome. His renewed efforts to obtain suitable employment proved fruitless, and so sank more and more deeply into his soul the conviction that he was a child of misfortune. Excessive study had induced a serious trouble with his eyes, which lasted all his life. Constantly struggling with illness and misery he found at last a faithful friend in Antonio Ranieri. Through his tender nursing the poet's undermined organism recovered for a time and rendered his last days at least peaceful. On the 14th of June, 1837, he died at Naples.

He was perhaps unduly aggressive in his attitude toward society and the world at large, too much withdrawn into himself, but he was of transcendent nobility of character and thoroughly imbued with the classic spirit. A man of such lofty aspirations endowed with such an iron perseverance, chained to such a wretched body and to such narrow circumstances, can one imagine a more tragic fate? His works, both prose and poetry, are distinguished by two characteristic features: his complete devotion to the classics and his pessimistic view of life. The former manifests itself in the form of his works, the latter in their substance. In every passage speaks to us the modern man wrapped in Grecian garb. The principal source of his Hellenism is to be sought in his uninterrupted philological

studies. Not only by reading but, as it were, by appropriating the manner of speech peculiar to the ancients has Leopardi acquired in prose that transparent and rapid style which evades all labored effects; he puts his thoughts down like marble blocks and his very simplicity creates a monumental impression. Leopardi's ideal was to write like Xenophon whose manner "è una semplicità veramente omerica e ironica e maravigliosa." He reached it very soon in prose and with zeal he strove toward the same perfection in poetry, as every one notices who compares his first odes, e. g. *All' Italia* with such later poems as *Il tramonto della luna*, or *La Ginestra*. To express in pregnant, concise language the inmost kernel of his thought, without adornment or labored metaphors and similes, but to say it powerfully, persuasively, overwhelmingly, this is the whole secret of his style in poetry. All that was mere declamation in his earlier poems his mature genius scattered to the winds. He broke likewise the customary form of the canzone and made for his thoughts a channel of his own; he became the creator of a poetry characteristically intellectual and truly philosophical. He ultimately gathered up his various ideas into one all-embracing theory of life, bitter and plaintive it is, yet that mental compactness and conciseness raised his poetry to the level of Dante. His pessimism is the result of his acute observation of life combined with deep philosophical studies. Leopardi's march towards originality and pessimism is best manifested in his poems. We see how at first he still cherishes hope in the path of the old Italian poetry, how full of courage and enthusiasm he is, how he collects all the elements of his strength. The more he abandons the inherited form, the more truthful he becomes in his pessimistic utterances; he throws away mask after mask whether it be called "fatherland" or "love," and when he sets into that irresistible stream of the canzone he then enunciates his cold and annihilating conviction without the least regard or reserve. There are only forty-one poems from his pen, but each is a step, a decided movement tending straight toward the goal: the ultimate confession of his philosophical views. In his patriotic poems he is the least independent since he follows very closely the examples set by his predecessors and it is especially Petrarch who speaks in certain turns and phrases. This is particularly true of his celebrated ode *All' Italia*. In spite of its pathetic force this is so little a poem of Leopardi that as Aulard justly observes, "it seems as if this voice celebrated the fatherland after a lapse of 400 years." Petrarch's panegyric of Cola Rienzi sounds almost like that of Angelo Mai by Leopardi. But the points of similarity lie more in the form than in the substance. Even in these patriotic poems there is besides the link that binds them to those of an earlier period a tone which distinguishes them strongly from the poetry of all others. Dante and Petrarch, Testi and Filicaja, Alfieri and Foscolo believed in the future of their country in spite of disruptions and manifold disasters; in spite of complaints and reproaches they were optimists. Leopardi from the beginning doubts, then he actually despairs. It really seems as if Leopardi in his

patriotic poems shrunk from his country as from an ideal which had deceived him, as from some cherished illusion. As he renounced religion, so likewise he forsook his country, and if he wrote of it, it was simply to make use of it as a fitting illustration of his pessimistic theory. Moreover, the poets before Leopardi's time addressed their sonnets and odes to the public at large, but Leopardi in his patriotic poems speaks only to the narrow circle of his friends. Sometimes indeed, he seems to speak only to himself or to the unresponsive walls of his father's library at Recanati. For love there was no place in Leopardi's poetry or philosophy, since to love is to perpetuate unhappiness and through love life which is equivalent to misfortune is multiplied. Against love, therefore, are directed his most powerful dialectics, though he conceives of it in an original way. He regards love as legitimate if, not having been satisfied, it be followed by suicide and thus he makes it truly a twin brother to death. On the whole love fares no better in his poetry than his country and it is the mask through which glimmers his favorite idea of utter destruction. Among his poems is one, *The Dream*, whose source, tenor and thoughts even we must seek in Petrarch's *Triumph of Death*. In his other love poems he utters nothing new, the complaints and reproaches of love unrequited or deceived are everywhere much the same, and wherever he found no opportunity of proclaiming his theory of misfortune, he remained true to traditional forms. One feels everywhere that he cared more for thought than for feeling, and the poem *Love and Death* is simply a spirited play of rhetoric and *The dominant Idea* celebrates the final triumph of the mind over weakness and doubt. All of a sudden he becomes unwontedly calm and peaceful, and it is innate not offended pride which finds utterance in the poem *To himself*. In this poem he rises above all doubt and uncertainty, and throwing aside all dissimulation he boldly announces his deep conviction. The unaffected but highly artistic verses of this poem opened the way for his philosophical poems and thus the adaptability of poetic form to philosophic thought was clearly made manifest.

Three poems are first presented to us in which the philosophic idea is veiled in mythologic garb, showing that the poet sought in classic models that strength and harmony which he looked for in vain in the works of his contemporaries. These poems are *Bruto Minore*, *The Last Song of Sappho*, *Spring*. His Brutus is far from being the Brutus of antiquity, a man of action rather than of words, who can hardly be conceived of as giving utterance to a long and elaborate speech on the inutility of virtue. His Sappho likewise is simply Leopardi himself wrapped in the antic peplus, just as Goethe's Prometheus blaspheming the gods represents Goethe's own personality. Leopardi speaks in these poems plainly enough, but, like De Vigny, he speaks through the mouths of others. He adopted this means of utterance in one other poem upon *The Wandering Shepherd in Asia*. We have now to consider his *Ginestra*, this flower of the desert, this poem of pessimism par excellence. Here the poet makes himself a mouth-piece for

all humanity, he is the voice which shouts woe, woe, unutterable woe! He proclaims the everlasting no! Regardless of what others have said before him, he attacks life and everything to which we attach value; he scoffs at human pride and loses himself in the thought of the infinite. He does not attack human reason but human life and Pascal's idea of "le roseau pensant" awakens in him only a compassionate smile. The tree that feels nothing when we cut it down, the animals which do not meditate upon their sufferings and pains are in his opinion more perfect than man; they are happier, they suffer no privations, they dread not death. This poem is the climax and crown of his lyrics. Only in the idea of utter destruction did he find peace, and it is only in Buddhism that we can find anything similar. Man with all his struggles and aspirations has shut himself up in one thought, and therefore *La Ginestra* is as truly poetical as it is philosophical. In it Leopardi spoke his last word. After *Ginestra* he could not write a single stanza of earnest poetry which would not be a repetition of ideas already expressed. If he did not become silent entirely it was because there remained to him still another weapon—desperate, diabolical laughter. Thus we come to Leopardi's satirical poems. They are not satires after the manner of Horace or Regnier, we should err if we were to seek in the *Paralipomeni della Batracomyomachia* a parodied history of Italy from the fall of Murat. His satire is not political, he does not attack governments, he attacks man. To him all governments were the same, even as every philosophical system was in his eyes ridiculous, insufficient and mischievous. This long poem is a kind of novel instinct with a fantastical philosophy, in a masterly meter and interesting only to Italians whom this impertinent satire most unmercifully scourges. The poet laughs but the reader cannot laugh. In the poem dedicated to Capponi he wields the lash over the apostles of progress. His dialogues constitute the continuation to his philosophical poems. They repeat in ever-changing phraseology one thought—all is vanity. "Our life, what is it worth but to be despised?" And behind it we seem to hear his desperate, demoniacal laughter. Leopardi's *Pensieri* betray a deep thinker, a clever dialectician, and utter on the whole no other truth than that already expressed in his dialogues and poems. His prose is highly classical, he created his own rhetoric, pliable and sonorous, yet exceedingly simple and natural. Giordani applies to Leopardi's style Cicero's words on the Commentaries of Cæsar: "Omni ornatu orationis tanquam veste detracto." It is the nudity of the athlete which shines in his prose, it is muscle itself, overpowering and convincing, yet without effort, playfully expressing a philosophy with smiling irony. Leopardi's pessimistic views were his most sincere conviction. It is false to deduce it from his sickness and his numerous failures to become happy, since they merely contributed to the ripening and strengthening of his pessimistic tendency whose source and germ were in his innermost soul and broke forth all the more powerfully by reason of study and observation. His pessimism can be compressed in one sentence: Everything suffers, evil and

misery are everywhere, and if we do not acknowledge this, it is because we fear the consequences to which it would lead us. Progress is a chimera, humanity with all its discoveries has not solved one secret of the universe, nature is a cruel, cunning, malicious force, all is illusion and in utter destruction alone lies salvation. Leopardi's views closely resemble those of Schopenhauer. What most astonishes us in Leopardi is the grand unity of his views, his complaints always have the true ring of profound conviction and of genuine heroic pain. In this respect he surpasses Byron and Alfred de Musset, in whose exclamations personal dissatisfaction plays a greater role than philosophic conviction. They cry out "I suffer," while Leopardi's theme is "We all suffer." Leopardi, by analyzing constantly his pain, reached at last the point where he generalized his sufferings in attributing them to the whole world. This is also Schopenhauer's idea. According to him, this world is the worst of possible worlds. "Alles Leben ist Leiden" is the keynote of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Neither Leopardi nor Schopenhauer has a priority in pessimism since we all know that it is as old as the world.

We who believe in progress, though in a different sense, can see especially in art the sterility and impotence of every pessimistic system, be there at its head Schopenhauer, Hartmann or any other great name; but we nevertheless acknowledge its right to our consideration especially when presented in such superb language as that of Leopardi.

The discussion was opened by Prof. J. S. Sheffoe.

Dr. L. E. Menger :

The literary biography of so versatile a genius as was Leopardi must necessarily comprehend two periods. The first period is that of the specialist, of him who is endowed with those perceptive faculties which enable him to discover the presence and determine the characteristics of some one phase of an author's thought, as separate and distinct from all other phases of thought of the same author. Thus different specialists must study Leopardi as a philologist, a poet or philosopher. When such labors are completed, the opportunity for the second stage of study arrives; there is then need of a mind of comprehensive cast, which can grasp the salient features developed by predecessors; which shall combine these in a skillful, harmonious way, and present to us the philologist, the poet, the philosopher, as an undivided whole; then and only then can we estimate so stupendous a talent. Judging from the great amount of literature which has appeared concerning Leopardi, we may suppose that the first period has been accomplished. The second has not been; the complete lives of Leopardi which have been attempted were written before the appearance of some of the most important monographs treating different features of his literary development; therefore such biographies are incomplete and

unsatisfactory. As well might Diez have attempted to found the Comparative Grammar of the Romance Languages without a previous sufficient knowledge of each member of the group.

When I first glanced over our program, it struck me as somewhat peculiar that we should give a mournful tone to this session at its very outset by the discussion of so lugubrious a personage as Leopardi. Not a ray of light breaks in to illuminate the Dantesque obscurity of his sombre existence, not even in its youthful stages; left, at ten years of age without masters, weak in body, having need of movement and light, in that austere household, which he hesitates to call a "prison" or a "cage" or a "tomb," and finally does call a "sepulchre of the living," the eagle-wings of that marvelous intellect were destined to bruise themselves in their first unguided soarings. But it is exactly to this period of his life, before he was twenty, that I should like to invite particular attention. There was pessimism before Leopardi, and in Italy too where Foscolo had already defined the anguish of a soul intense in its aspirations, but hidebound by circumstance. That which appeals to me as striking and unique in Leopardi is what he accomplished in those ten years before he revealed himself to us as we know him. Leopardi as a student, as a philologist, following a path made by himself, delving blindly and desperately into the classics, and attaining no mean results. Little was known about what he had done in this direction (for few of his philological efforts were published) until two years ago, when there appeared in Italy a work by Moroncini, *Studio sul Leopardi filologo*, which work fell into my hands in Florence last summer, and was very interesting to me. Moroncini obtained access to the unpublished MSS. of Leopardi, and there discovered an immense amount of work which Leopardi accomplished between the age of ten and twenty. His first writings were on subjects gathered from his readings and bore such titles as *The Magi*, *Caesar*, *Samson*, *Cato in Africa*, the *Death of Christ*, *Hector*, *Fortune*, *Friendship*, etc., biblical or classical. Indeed the question occurs to me if such studies did not begin the process of formation of that state of mind in Leopardi, which later rendered it impossible for him to appreciate or be a part of his age.

Meditation on and descriptions of arguments so far distant in time and interest from contemporary life, so far at variance with the spirit or sense of that time could not but adulterate and falsify the mind and make him, as he expresses it, "a jarring and dissonant thing" in the chorus of universal nature. At ten years of age he translated parts of Horace and Ovid; at fifteen he commenced Greek, and soon after Hebrew. He wrote a history of Astronomy from its origins to his day. He took up the study of an obscure grammarian of the sixth century, Esichio; next the Greek rhetoricians; then the church-fathers; then the popular heroes of antiquity. He next turned to the poets Theocritus and Anacreon, but soon tired of them, and began serious work on Homer and Vergil, and his first printed work was a version of the first canto of the *Odyssey*.

All this was done before he was twenty; at that age he awoke to the sad discovery that it was impossible for him to study any more. Then it was that he gave vent in poetry to the enthusiasms of his classicism and his spirit condemned to inaction, as if lashed by an implacable Nemesis, broke forth in those songs in which the highest note of lyricism is touched.

But his love for classic studies never left him, and in the last days of his life with his curious and persistent predilection for the moralists and rhetoricians, he translated the Manual of Epictetus and some of Isocrates. Notes left by him prove that he contemplated a great amount of work in this line, which his health never allowed him to carry out.

If we try to sum up his merit as a philologist, we see that a lack of method made him wander from subject to subject, as if desirous only of appropriating as much as possible of ancient knowledge. But certainly for his time, and considering the age at which he accomplished his work, he had not a peer in Europe. There were excellent dispositions to study which lacked only the proper surroundings to fructify and develop them.

I have spoken beyond the limit of the allotted time, but it seemed to me the point was worth emphasizing. Leopardi was something else before he was a poet; he was a student. Biographies of most of our great poets will show that they revealed a predominant poetic bent in boyhood; Leopardi did not; who knows how his wondrous mind might have manifested itself to us, had not his body been so frail?

2. "An historical study of the *Werwolf* in literature." By Dr. Kirby Flower Smith, of the Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. M. D. Learned :

I have been greatly interested in the sound method of this paper. The origin of the wolf-myth in German mythology and German folklore is a very early one. We are told that the wolf existed generally together with primitive man. He was, perhaps, the most fierce and furious of all the enemies of man in the animal kingdom. That was certainly so in the North, and I believe that the idea of the wolf in northern mythology is a development from the natural circumstances of hostility existing between the wolf and man. Hence we have in the *Edda* Fenrir, that grotesque conception of the wolf as an all-devouring monster.

In regard to the later transmission of this form, as found in the folk-lore and folk-song, it is interesting to note that the Grimms in their collection, *Deutsche Sagen*, have given us two survivals, which touch upon both phases of the *Werwolf's* character, as pointed out by Dr. Smith. In one of these folk-songs, I think it is No. 82 in the collection, a woman has a child that is deformed and she thinks she will take it to Neuhausen and have it weighed, and go through the usual ceremonies there of giving the child a